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TREES AND STONES AS INFORMERS.

A WELL-KNOWN passage in *Macbeth* runs (3. 4. 122-6) :

It will have blood ; they say, blood will have blood ;
 Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak ;
 Augurs and understood relations have
 By magot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
 The secret'st man of blood.

The latest edition (1903) of the Furness Variorum, for which Mr. H. H. Furness, Jr., is responsible, has the following note on the word *trees* (l. 123) :

‘Steevens. Alluding perhaps to the tree which revealed the murder of Polydorus, Virgil, *Æneid*, iii, 22-68.—[It is more likely that Steevens cited this from memory ; had he looked more closely it would have been apparent that it was not the tree which revealed the murder, but the ghostly voice of Polydorus himself, “gemitus lacrimabilis imo Auditur tumulo, et vox reddita fertur ad aures.”—III, 39, 40. In Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Bk. 8, ch. vi, p. 165, ed. 1584, there is the following : “This practise [by cousening oracles] began in the okes of Dodona, in the which was a wood, the trees thereof (they saie) could speake.” Again in Bk. 4, ch. xviii, p. 208, “Divine auguries were such, as men were made beleewe were done miraculously, as when dogs spake . . . or when trees spake, as before the death of *Cæsar*.” There are indications that Shakespeare had read the *Discoverie*, and Malone conjectured that at the time of the writing of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare was also meditating and reading on the subject of *Julius Cæsar*. Is it not likely, therefore, that Scot and not Virgil suggested the speaking trees? Scot may have been indebted to Virgil for his statement in regard to the trees at the death of *Cæsar*. In the *Georgics*, i, 476, speaking of the portents before that event, Virgil says : “Vox quoque per lucos vulgò exaudita silentes Ingeniis.”—*Ed.* ii].’

The note on *stones* is much less satisfactory than the foregoing.

The spirit of the Shakespearean passage is well reflected in the following lines from Vaughan's *The Stone* :

Hence sand and dust
Are shaken for witnesses ; and stones,
Which some think dead, shall all at once
With one attesting voice detect
Those secret sins we least suspect.
For know, wild men, that when you err
Each thing turns scribe and register,
And, in obedience to his Lord,
Doth your most private sins record.

Vaughan cites, at the head of his poem, *Josh.* 24. 27, which runs : ' And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us, for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us ; it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.'

The earlier part of the poem is as follows :

I have it now ;
But where to act that none shall know ?
Where I shall have no cause to fear
An eye or ear,
What man will show ?
If nights, and shades, and secret rooms,
Silent as tombs,
Will not conceal nor assent to
My dark designs, what shall I do ?
Man I can bribe, and woman will
Consent to any gainful ill,
But these dumb creatures are so true
No gold nor gifts can them subdue ;
Hedges have ears, saith the old sooth,
And every bush is something's booth ;
This cautious fools mistake, and fear
Nothing but man when ambushed there.
But I, alas !
Was shown one day in a strange glass
That busy commerce kept between
God and his creatures, though unseen.
They hear, see, speak,
And into loud discoveries break,
As loud as blood.

The general notion is as old in classical literature as Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1074–7 (Murray's translation, somewhat free):

Hippolytus. Ye stones, will ye not speak? Ye castle walls!
 Bear witness if I be so vile, so false!

Theseus. Aye, fly to voiceless witnesses! Yet here
 A dumb deed speaks against thee, and speaks clear!

Cf. *Hippol.* 418.

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